

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE

ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD

COVINGTON, TENN.

JULY 10, 1936

INVESTIGATION NO. 2079

SUMMARY

Railroad: Illinois Central
Date: July 10, 1936
Location: Covington, Tenn.
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Passenger
Train number: No. 16
Engine number: 1186
Consist: 6 cars
Speed: 50-65 m.p.h.
Track: 1^o curve to left; grade slightly descending
Weather: Clear
Time: 12:10 a.m.
Casualties: 3 killed; 8 injured
Cause: Train struck automobile which was being driven on track in same direction as that in which train was moving.

August 1, 1936

To the Commission:

On July 10, 1936, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Illinois Central Railroad at Covington, Tenn., as a result of striking an automobile, this accident resulting in the death of 2 employees and the driver of the automobile, and the injury of 8 passengers on the train.

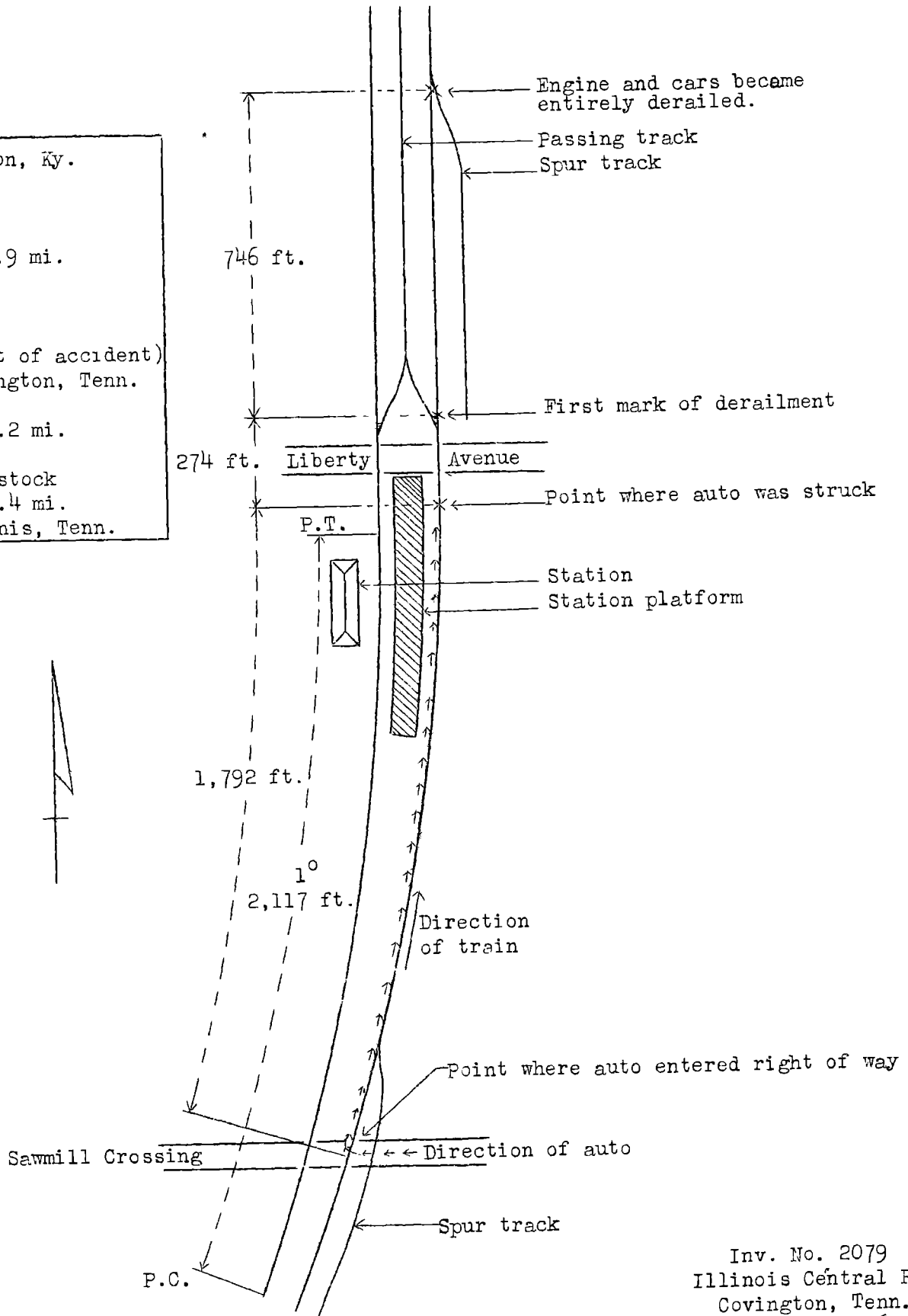
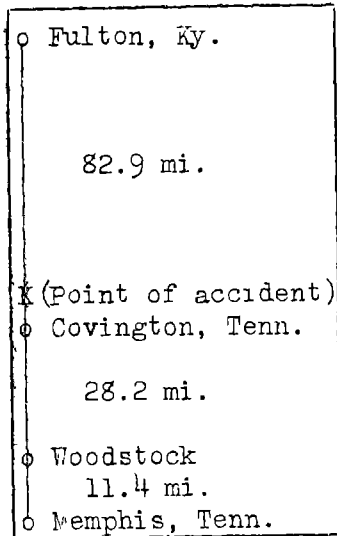
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Fulton District of the Kentucky Division which extends between Fulton, Ky., and Woodstock, near Memphis, Tenn., a distance of 111.1 miles. This is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The point of accident was near the north end of the station platform or about 200 feet north of the center line of the station; approaching this point from the south, there is a 1° curve to the left which is 2,117 feet in length, followed by tangent track for about 1 mile, and the accident occurred on this tangent track 97 feet beyond the leaving end of the curve. The grade is slightly descending for north-bound trains.

The station at Covington is on the west side of the main tracks and a street known as Liberty Avenue crosses the tracks at a right angle at the northern end of the station platform, the center line of the highway being 109 feet north of the point of accident and about 300 feet north of the center of the station. North of Liberty Avenue there is a facing-point switch leading from the north-bound main track to the left to an auxiliary passing track, this switch being located 212 feet from the point of accident. At a point 1,072 feet north of the point of accident, there is a trailing point switch leading to industries on the east side of the main tracks. The first highway south of the station is Sanford Avenue, known as "Sawmill Crossing," 1,901 feet from Liberty Avenue; this highway crosses the tracks at a slight angle and serves a lumber yard located on the east side of the tracks.

The ground line between Sawmill Crossing and Liberty Avenue is about level with the tracks, and when the south-bound track is not occupied a person standing on Sawmill Crossing can see the entire distance to Liberty Avenue; about the time the accident occurred, however, there was a freight train moving southward on the south-bound track between the two highways in question.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident which occurred about 12:10 a.m.



Inv. No. 2079
 Illinois Central RR,
 Covington, Tenn.
 July 10, 1936

Description

Train No. 16, a north-bound passenger train, consisted of 1 mail car, 1 combination baggage and express car, 1 coach, 1 club car and 2 sleeping cars, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 1186, and was in charge of Conductor Nelson and Engineman Lawler. This train passed Woodstock, 28.2 miles from Covington and the last open office, at 11:41 p.m., according to the train sheet, on time, and was traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 50 and 65 miles per hour when it struck an automobile which was being driven on the track near the station at Covington.

The automobile involved was an 8-cylinder Ford Coupe, 1934 model, driven by J. H. McDow, a resident of Covington. The indications were that this automobile entered upon the tracks of the railroad at Sawmill Crossing and then turned off from the highway and proceeded northward on the right-of-way of the railroad, between a spur track and the north-bound main track; it passed over the switch connecting the spur with the main track and then continued northward on the latter track and was moving at a speed thought by an eyewitness to have been from 10 to 15 miles per hour when it was overtaken by Train No. 16.

After striking the automobile, the engine apparently continued on the rails until it encountered the facing-point switch leading to the auxiliary passing track, where one pair of engine-truck wheels became derailed. It then continued until it reached the trailing-point switch several hundred feet farther north where the final derailment occurred. The engine stopped on its left side diagonally across the tracks, with its head end 1,361 feet north of the point where the automobile was struck; the first two cars stopped on their right sides to the right of the north-bound track, while the coach, club car and front truck of the first sleeping car also were derailed, these cars remaining upright. The automobile was carried on the pilot of the engine until it stopped, being finally deposited on the north-bound track 41 feet beyond the front of the engine. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Nelson and Flagman Forest, of Train No. 16, who were riding in the third and fourth cars, respectively, noticed nothing unusual until there was a sudden application of the air brakes; the conductor estimated the speed at the time of the accident to have been about 50 miles per hour, while the flagman thought it was 60 or 65 miles per hour. After the train had stopped the flagman went back to flag and he said he saw

parts of the rear end of an automobile along the track, while some of the ties were burning a short distance south of Liberty Avenue crossing.

Dr. Lindsay, who attended the fireman after the accident, quoted the fireman as saying that he was watching for the train-order signal and that after he saw it he then looked back at the track ahead of his engine and saw an automobile on the track proceeding in the same direction as the train; he at once called a warning to the engineman and the latter applied the brakes.

Operator Birchett, on duty at Covington until midnight, said he had started for Liberty Avenue and had reached a point about two-thirds of the distance between the station and the avenue when he saw a south-bound freight train approaching, and on looking southward he saw a light upon the track; about the time the engine of the freight train passed him this light developed into the headlights of an automobile approaching on the north-bound track and he estimated that at that time it was about halfway between Sawmill Crossing and the station, moving at a speed he thought might have been about 15 miles per hour. He then started back toward the station with the idea of obtaining something to use in stopping Train No. 16, although he realized that if it was on time he would not be able to do so. In the meantime the freight train was passing him and he said that the head end of Train No. 16 arrived just a second or two before the caboose of the freight train cleared his line of vision, and from his position about opposite the northern end of the station he saw a flash of fire and as the passenger train continued northward there seemed to be a streak of fire under the entire train. Operator Birchett was unable to state what whistle signals were sounded by the engineman of Train No. 16 and did not know whether the headlight on that train was burning, saying that he could not see it until after the freight train had passed and by that time the collision with the automobile had occurred.

Engineman Berger, of Extra 7043, the south-bound freight train which was passing Covington at the time of the accident, said his train was moving at a speed of about 50 miles per hour and that as he approached the station he saw the reflection of a light around the curve and thought it was Train No. 16. Within a few seconds, however, he realized that it was an automobile, about 1,000 feet south of the station, but even then he did not realize that it was being driven on the north-bound track until his engine had passed it and the fireman called it to his attention.

Fireman Lovell, of Extra 7043, said his first knowledge of anything unusual was when his train reached Liberty Avenue crossing, at which time he saw two lights which were bobbing up and down; he then realized that they belonged to an automobile, which appeared to be somewhere near the southern end of the station platform, which is 675 feet south of the point of accident, and he also realized that this automobile was traveling on the north-bound track. The fireman said he at once jumped up preparatory to obtaining a fusee from the engineman's side of the cab so that he could flag Train No. 16, which he knew was due about that time, but he did not have time to get the fusee before the engine of that train passed him. Fireman Lovell further stated that he saw the reflection of the headlight of Train No. 16 but that he was unable to say whether the whistle was sounded.

Conductor Myers and Flagman Willis, of Extra 7043, who were riding in the caboose of that train, were unable to add anything of importance except to say that the whistle of Train No. 16 was being sounded and that the headlight was burning when the engine passed their caboose at a point about 4 or 5 car lengths south of Liberty Avenue crossing.

Traveling Engineer Ryan made an examination of engine 1186 as soon as he reached the scene, but was unable to find anything which could have contributed in any way to the occurrence of the accident. Division Engineer Chumley said he found marks on the ties about 100 feet south of Liberty Avenue, indicating the approximate point where Train No. 16 struck the automobile, and northward from this point the ties were badly scarred in the center of the track, these marks apparently having been made by the pilot of the engine. About 150 feet north of the crossing, near the frog of the facing-point switch, were parts of the rear end of an automobile and also a wheel, while between the point of the switch and the frog there were marks indicating that one pair of engine-truck wheels had been derailed. These marks then continued until they reached the trailing-point switch several hundred feet farther north, where the lead rail diverted the derailed pair of wheels, the equipment becoming entirely derailed just north of the frog. The division engineer further stated that marks made by an automobile were found on the east side of the north-bound track at Sawmill Crossing, showing that an automobile had been driven between the main track and the spur track. These marks continued northward until the tracks were closer together and then there were marks where tires had rubbed against the outside of the west rail of the spur and then they had rubbed against that rail and also the outside of the east rail of the north-bound main track, until finally the left wheels crossed over the main-track rail while the right wheels rode over the filler block of the frog and then struck the heel of the switch point. The left wheels

then crossed the west rail of the main track and from that point to where the automobile was struck by Train No. 16 the marks on the ties and ballast showed that the automobile had been traveling astride the west rail.

Several witnesses were located who were in the vicinity or were passing over Liberty Avenue crossing at the approximate time of the accident; some of them said their attention was attracted by unusual whistling and there were some who saw the automobile on the tracks. A witness who had been with the driver of the automobile, Mr. McDow, from 6 p.m. until about 11:30 p.m. testified that during that period Mr. McDow drank five bottles of beer and was in such a condition that anyone could readily see that he had been drinking.

Discussion

The investigation of this accident indicated that a south-bound freight train was passing Covington and that as Train No. 16 approached the station the fireman, who was on the inside of the curve, was looking for the train-order signal and that he then looked ahead again and saw an automobile on the track moving in the same direction as the train; he called a warning to the engineman, who applied the brakes, but it was too late to avert the accident. The evidence also indicated that the automobile, which was proceeding northward on the tracks, was struck at a point about 109 feet south of the center of the highway which crosses the tracks north of the station, and that after colliding with the automobile the engine continued on over the crossing, became partly derailed by wreckage at a switch located just north of the crossing, and became entirely derailed at another switch located several hundred feet farther north.

It further appeared that the driver of the automobile involved was in his 70th year and had consumed five bottles of beer, between 6 p.m. and 11:30 p.m., and was so affected thereby that anyone could tell he had been drinking. There was ample evidence to show that he turned his automobile on to the tracks of the railroad at a highway crossing located 1,800 feet south of the point of accident, and then proceeded on the tracks, bumping over the ties and rails, as well as a switch encountered en route, until his automobile was overtaken by Train No. 16.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by the train striking an automobile which was being driven on the track in the same direction as that in which the train was moving.

Respectfully submitted,
W. J. PATTERSON,
Director.